

CA1
EP
-2068

Environment
Canada

Government
Publications

Down-to-Earth Choices

Tips for making where you live one
of Canada's Healthy Neighbourhoods.

3 1761 11727057 9



Down-to-Earth Choices

Tips for making where you live one of Canada's Healthy Neighbourhoods.

A simple-to-use guide from Environment Canada offering hundreds of tips and suggestions on environmentally sensitive habits for individual Canadians to practise every day, everywhere. Our choices and our actions will determine the future of the environment. Let's choose to act wisely now and make the world a safer and healthier place to live in.

In order to respond to as many requests as possible, the number of additional booklets per request will be limited. We encourage you to photocopy the booklet as needed. There is also a web version of the booklet at <http://www.ec.gc.ca/Action21/tips>. For more information, please contact Environment Canada's Inquiry Centre, 351 St. Joseph Boulevard, Hull, Quebec K1A 0H3, telephone at (819) 997-2800 or 1-800-668-6767.

Également disponible sous le titre : *Choix terre-à-terre : Conseils pour que votre quartier soit l'un des voisinages en santé.*

Credits

Printed by Action 21, Communications & Consultations Directorate, Environment Canada

Design and illustration consultants:
Mantle & Overall Communications

This publication is based on the booklet *What Atlantic Canadians Can Do For Their Environment*, published in January 1989 by the Communications Directorate of Environment Canada's Atlantic Region.

Revised and updated March 1998 with thanks to the people who offered suggestions and comments.

Issued on the authority of the Minister of the Environment

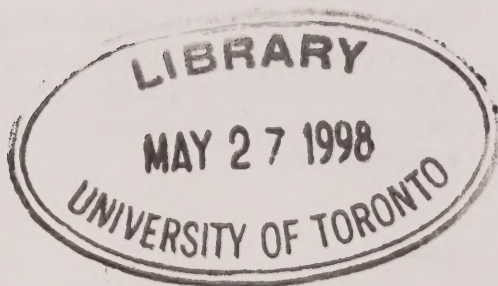
© Minister of Public Works and Government Services 1998.

Printed in Canada
Catalogue En21-77/1997E
ISBN 0-662-25484-8



Contents

Introduction	2
In Your Home	3
In Your Yard	13
While Shopping	21
At School	24
The Automobile	26
At Work	30
Outdoors	33
You and Your Neighbours	37
Where To Get Help	41



Introduction

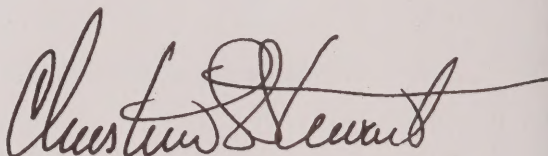
In Canada, we increasingly understand that our environment is merely "borrowed" from future generations, and that the privilege of temporary ownership does not give us the right to pollute the planet or deplete resources.

More and more, we are working to prevent further pollution, clean up what has been contaminated, and preserve what is good in our world so that our children may both inherit and pass on to their children a healthy environment – an environment for life.

Environment Canada is working with the provinces, municipalities, industry, private sector, groups and individuals to improve the quality of our environment. One of Environment Canada's roles is to foster environmental citizenship among all Canadians.

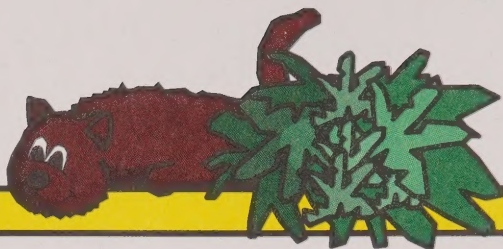
Environmental citizenship means getting informed and involved in environmental issues, and using this knowledge as the basis for responsible environmental action in your community and in your everyday life.

It is the responsibility of individuals, communities and organizations to make sure that our environment is good for life. This booklet describes hundreds of things that you can do to protect and improve your local environment. Whether you are a member of a community or an organization, or acting on your own, you can be part of the solution toward a safer and healthier place to live. Every action leaves an imprint on our Earth. Help make your neighbourhood one of Canada's healthy communities.



Christine Stewart
Minister of the Environment

In Your Home



What better place to initiate action to protect the environment than in your own home? It's where we spend most of our time, it's where we have the most control over how things are done, it's where we want to feel safest, and it's where we display to the world who and what we really are.

In the kitchen, bath, and laundry room

Each of us uses about 340 litres of water each day—just indoors! Of that, 30% is flushed down the toilet. Another 35% is used in showers and baths.

■ Reduce water use in the toilet by about 20 percent by installing a toilet dam or placing a weighted plastic bottle filled with water in your toilet tank. Low-flush toilets reduce water use by 50 to 80 percent.

■ Use a water flow reducing attachment in your sink faucets and low-flow showerheads to reduce water use and wastage. Look for EcoLogo[™]-certified plumbing products when you shop (see page 21 for an example of the EcoLogo).

■ Always be sure to turn taps off tightly so they do not drip.

■ Promptly repair leaks in and around taps and faucets. (One leak can waste several thousand litres of water per year.)

■ When hand-washing dishes or cleaning fruit and vegetables, don't run the water continuously. Wash them in a partially filled sink, then rinse them quickly under the tap.

■ If you have an automatic dishwasher, use it only to wash full loads, and use the energy saver option or shortest cycle necessary to get the dishes clean.

■ When boiling vegetables, conserve water by using just enough to cover them and use a tightly fitting lid.

■ Keep a bottle of drinking water in the refrigerator, instead of running the tap until the water gets cool each time you want some. Be sure to rinse the container and change the water every few days.

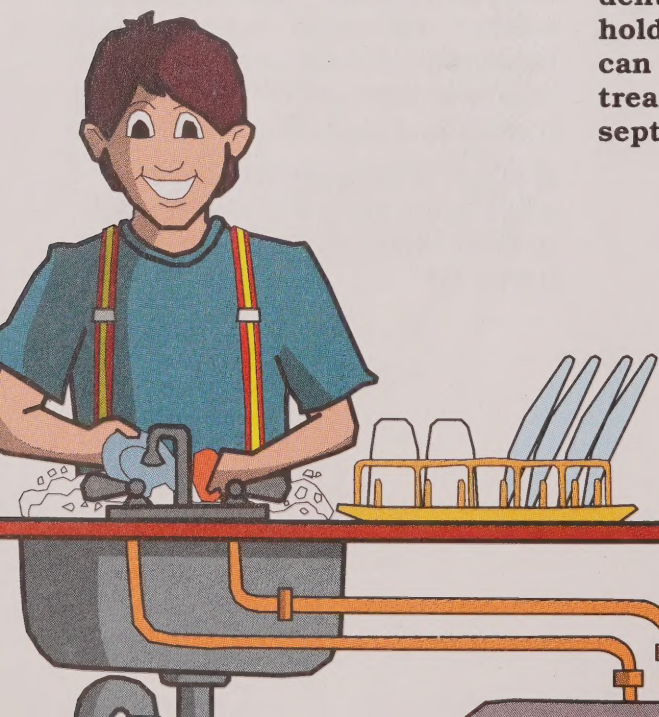
■ When washing or shaving, partially fill the sink basin and use that water rather than running the tap continuously. (This reduces water use by about 60 percent.) Use short bursts of water to clean razors.

■ Likewise, when brushing your teeth, turn off the water while you are actually brushing, instead of running it continuously. Use water from a mug for rinsing. (This reduces water use by about 80 percent.)

■ Short showers use less water than baths. If you still prefer bathing, avoid overfilling the tub—one half full should be enough.

■ Check regularly for toilet tank leaks into the toilet bowl by putting a small amount of food colouring into the tank and observing if it spreads to the bowl without flushing. Repair leaks promptly. Also periodically examine whether the plunge ball and flapper valve in the tank are properly “seated” and replace parts when necessary. Likewise, regularly check for leaks at the base of your toilet, and have any promptly repaired.

■ **Never flush garbage of any kind down your toilet. Cigarette butts, paper diapers, dental floss, plastic tampon holders, condoms and the like can create problems at sewage treatment plants or with your septic tank.**



■ Make sure your electric water heater and pipes are insulated to obtain hot water more quickly, reduce wastage and save energy (and money). Do not insulate a gas water heater. Do not insulate hot water pipes within six inches of the flue for gas water heaters.

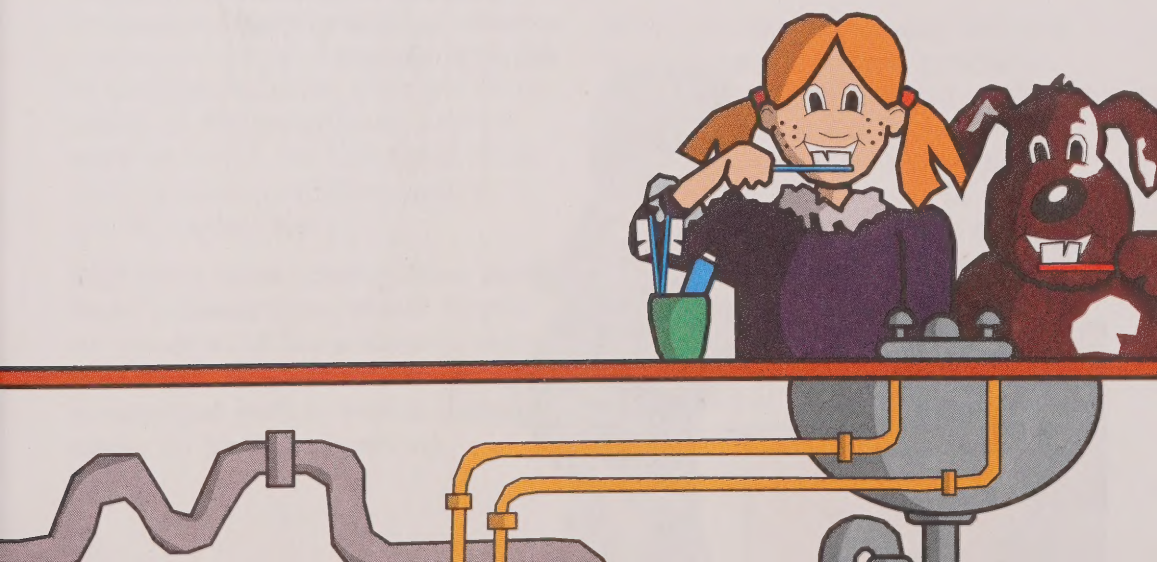
■ If you have a water meter, locate it and periodically record the reading late in the evening and again early the next morning between any water use. Compare the readings to see if there was any leakage during the night. If so, track it down and have it repaired promptly.

■ Wash only full loads of laundry in your washing machine. If your washer has an adjustable water-level indicator, set the dial to use only as much water as is really necessary.

■ Use the shortest cycle possible for washing your clothes. Use warm water rather than hot, and use the “suds-saver” feature if your machine has it.

■ If possible, line-dry your clothes outside in the summer. The clothes smell great and it saves money on energy bills.

■ Produce your own organic fertilizer and reduce garbage by creating and maintaining a compost pile. Explore vermicomposting if you live in an apartment or don't produce enough waste for a compost pile. See the section on “Composting”, page 18, for more information.



Energy efficiency

Canada is one of the highest users of energy in the world.

You can significantly cut your energy consumption and costs, and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions leading to climate change by taking a few simple steps around your home.

■ Check the EnerGuide label when buying major home appliances and choose those with the lowest energy consumption ratings. It will save you money in the long run.

■ Turn off the lights, television, stereo, computer and radio when you leave the room.

■ A compact fluorescent bulb uses about 75 percent less energy than an incandescent bulb and lasts 10 times longer.

■ Instead of a regular oven, use a pressure cooker or microwave where possible. They cook food faster and use much less energy.

■ Install a programmable thermostat to automatically turn down the heat at night and when you will be away during the day.

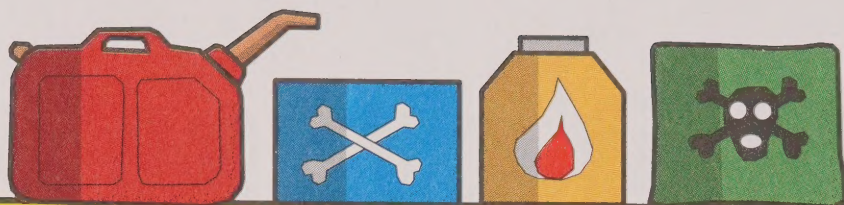
■ Upgrading your insulation, applying weather-stripping and caulking can reduce heating bills in the winter and keep your house cooler during the hot summer months.

■ Your furnace will run more efficiently if you change or clean its filters regularly and have it serviced once a year.

■ Clean the coils in the back of your fridge so that it will run more efficiently.

■ Turn off the water heater when on vacation, and turn its regular heating temperature to 49 degrees Celsius (120 degrees Fahrenheit) to avoid scalds and save money all year round.





Household hazardous wastes

You may have more hazardous products in your home than you think. They may be items that are corrosive, such as bleach and oven cleaners; flammable, such as solvents and some furniture polishes; toxic, such as wood-stain and herbicides; or reactive, such as aerosol cans. Hazardous products must be properly disposed of to protect the environment.

- Buy only as much of these products as you are likely to need to do the job.
- Use the products carefully, according to label directions.
- Inquire about hazardous waste depots and special household hazardous waste collection days in your community, and be sure to take advantage of them.
- If there is no depot but you know that household hazardous waste collection days will be held in your area, store your products safely in the meantime, and be sure to watch for instructions on how to transport them safely to the collection site.
- **If your community does not have a hazardous waste depot or household hazardous waste collection days, contact your municipal public works department to have one set up.**

Storage of household hazardous wastes

- Always store hazardous products in their original containers so that handling and disposal instructions on labels can be followed and so that others are not misled about the contents.
- Store hazardous products in tightly closed containers in a well-ventilated area where children and pets cannot get at them.
- A chlorine bleach and ammonia mixture creates a highly poisonous gas. Be careful not to mix them together. Keep acids away from bleaches or ammonia.
- Never use empty hazardous product containers to store any other materials.

Re-using household hazardous wastes

- If you have unwanted, leftover hazardous household products, other than medicine and certain pesticides, ask if a friend, relative or neighbour could make use of them. Or perhaps you can donate paint and other products to community groups, etc. However, be sure to pass them on only in their original containers with their original labels and with any safety notices or instructional leaflets that came with them.

Disposal of household hazardous wastes

Always read the labels on containers and follow their disposal instructions carefully.

- Completely use if you can, or pass on to other people, all of the contents of these household products.
- Sealed empty containers should be disposed of with your ordinary garbage or as directed by the manufacturer. They should never be re-used to store other materials.
- Do not burn any hazardous household products in fireplaces or backyard fires.
- Never burn, crush or puncture any aerosol containers even when empty. They can explode! Dispose of them at a hazardous waste depot.

■ Do not discard batteries used in flashlights, radios, clocks, watches, calculators and toys in your ordinary garbage; save them for disposal at a hazardous waste depot.

Disposal of oven cleaners, toilet bowl cleaners, sink drain cleaners, bleaches, rust removers and most other acids and alkali products

■ Seal unwanted or leftover waste in its original container and store in a cool, dry area safely out of reach of children and pets until it can be taken to a household hazardous waste depot for treatment by a licensed operator.

Disposal of paint and solvents, spot removers, carpet and furniture cleaners, floor and furniture polishes, and glues

■ Unwanted leftover portions should be tightly sealed in the original containers, placed in plastic bags, and disposed of at a hazardous waste depot or safely stored until your community has a hazardous waste collection day.

■ Allow used thinners and solvents to sit in a well-sealed jar until particles settle. Pour off the clear liquid and re-use. Remaining contaminants should be taken to a hazardous waste depot.





Disposal of barbecue starter fluid, lighter fluid, gasoline, furnace and motor oil

- If you have leftovers, dispose of them at a hazardous waste depot.
- Containers that are completely empty should be tightly sealed and then disposed of with your ordinary garbage.

Disposal of prescription medicines and over-the-counter drugs

- Never flush leftover prescription medicines or over-the-counter drugs down the toilet or pass them on to anyone else. Return unused medicines to your local pharmacy for proper disposal.
- Completely empty medicine containers should never be re-used; they should be disposed of with your ordinary garbage.

Disposal of house and garden pesticides

- Any leftovers should be disposed of properly. Phone your provincial environment department for instructions; disposal methods vary depending on the type and amount of pesticide.
- Never dump unwanted pesticide onto the ground or into drains, sewers, streams, rivers or lakes.

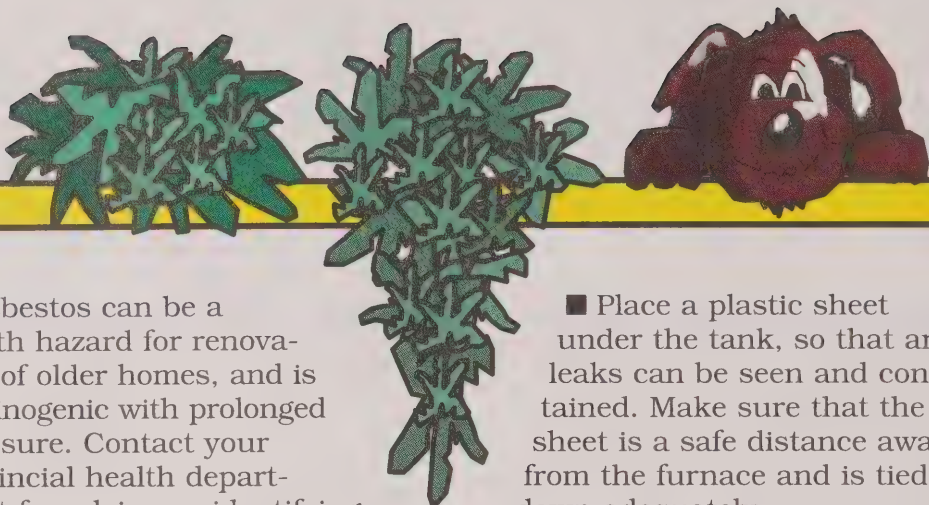
Indoor plants and insects

- Use insecticidal soaps in place of chemical sprays for insects on plants in your home.
- Consider buying beneficial plants, such as spider plants, that help filter out air impurities in your home.

Home repairs and renovations

Consider these suggestions if you are repairing or renovating your home.

- If your house was built before 1980, the interior or exterior paint may contain lead. Removing old paint is potentially very hazardous. Before removing old paint, contact your local Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation office to obtain its safety rules for removing and disposing of lead-based paint.
- Use less-toxic paints, paint removers, stains and varnishes, waxes, glues and adhesives, cleaners, etc.
- Use EcoLogo low-pollution paint.



■ Asbestos can be a health hazard for renovators of older homes, and is carcinogenic with prolonged exposure. Contact your provincial health department for advice on identifying and handling asbestos.

■ If you must use products containing hazardous chemicals, wear rubber gloves, eye goggles and, if appropriate, a respirator while doing so. Dispose of any unwanted leftover portions in an environmentally responsible way (see the earlier section on “Household hazardous wastes”).

■ Driveway sealers release volatile organic compounds (VOCs) into the atmosphere that can contribute to the formation of smog. This can be reduced by using EcoLogo-approved sealers, which contain lower levels of VOCs.

Heating-oil storage tanks

One litre of oil can contaminate up to two million litres of water.

■ Regularly inspect your heating-oil tank for visible signs of leaks. Also, monitor oil levels and use patterns to detect any unusual content losses and have leaks repaired promptly.

■ Place a plastic sheet under the tank, so that any leaks can be seen and contained. Make sure that the sheet is a safe distance away from the furnace and is tied down adequately.

Practise the 3 Rs

The average Canadian generates almost two kilograms of garbage every day—more than any other citizen in the world.

*The best way to cut down on waste production is to **reduce** our consumption of products. Next, we should **re-use** products as much as possible, before discarding them. And when we **recycle** items, we are conserving our forestry and metal resources and reducing the pollution caused by manufacturing and by ordinary garbage disposal methods. For example, one family's yearly supply of newspapers can be recycled into almost enough insulation for one house.*

Reduce

■ Don't buy more than you really need. It costs you more and just ends up as garbage we can do without.

■ Avoid over-packaged products. They produce unnecessary garbage.

■ Think twice before throwing away items that no longer work properly or are worn. Will repairing or refinishing them make more environmental sense than replacing them? Is there a charitable group in your community that fixes old appliances and sells them?

■ Buy products that are well made and durable; that way you'll reduce waste while saving yourself time, money and aggravation.

■ Completely use up the products you have before you buy more—don't throw unused portions away.

■ Look for EcoLogo products that have a high content of recycled materials in their manufacture.

Re-use

■ Be practical and creative in finding further uses for things instead of just discarding them.

■ Empty glass jars and plastic containers can be used to store bulk food, workshop articles and odds and ends.

■ Purchase re-usable cloth bags for your weekly trips to the grocery store and for other shopping.

■ Plastic shopping bags can be taken back to supermarkets for re-use, used as garbage bags instead of buying special bags, or used to protect certain articles from dust and moisture.

■ Cardboard boxes and paper bags can be used to store things, or when packing items for your next move.

■ Cans can be used to sort and store small household and workshop items, as indoor plant pots, and to place around garden plants as protection from insects.

■ Wrapping paper, string, rubber bands and twist ties will soon be needed again.



■ If you can't find another way to re-use items yourself, pass them on to others who would welcome them.

■ Clothing, toys, furniture and almost all other household items can be donated to religious or social service groups for use or sale; or you can sell them yourself at a garage sale.

■ Books and magazines can be donated to hospitals, senior citizens' residences, religious and social service organizations, and schools.

■ Many items can be donated to schools and day-care centres for use in handicrafts. Call to find out what they need.

■ Tissue paper and gift boxes and bags can be re-used for packaging gifts or parcels.

Recycle

Recycling can have a dramatic effect on the amount of energy used. The environmental costs of recovering, re-using, and recycling materials can be up to 100 times less than the environmental costs of producing new materials. For example, every tonne of glass recycled reduces the equivalent

of 1,057 kg of carbon dioxide emissions. The use of secondary paper resources instead of virgin materials results in a 74 percent reduction in air pollution, a 35 percent reduction in water pollution and a 58 percent reduction in water use.

■ Contact your municipality or county to find out more about the recycling programs and collection services in your community. Motor oil, newspapers, glass and cans are recycled in many communities, and some programs also accept other materials, such as plastics and corrugated cardboard.

■ If you belong to a club or organization, get it involved in recycling.

■ To help reduce pressures on our natural resources and build markets for recycled products, buy products made of recycled materials.



In Your Yard

Our yards are personal parks over which we have complete control. But making them into "pockets of paradise" need not mean using pesticides to control the weeds and insects that want to share your space. There are many alternatives that can be experimented with. If it is necessary to use pesticides, be sure to follow label directions and use them in a safe and responsible manner.



Watering lawns and gardens

In spite of what many people think, Canada does not have an endless supply of water. However, we are among the world's highest users of this most essential resource. During the summer, daily residential water use can increase by as much as 50 per-

cent, primarily because of lawn and garden watering, as well as car washing.

■ Water your lawn and garden only when absolutely necessary and avoid over-watering. During dry spells, water lawns deeply (2-3 cm of water) every five days, rather than for a short period every day.

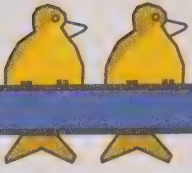
■ Water in the coolest part of the day (before 10 a.m.) and on non-windy days to reduce water loss to evaporation.

■ Use sprinklers that deliver large droplets in a flat pattern rather than those that throw the water high into the air, again to avoid wastage and evaporation.

■ Place your sprinklers and hoses carefully so that water does not land on driveways, sidewalks, or streets.

■ Use automatic timers on sprinklers if you will be leaving during the watering.





■ Collect rain water in a barrel or other large container, and use the water in your garden.

■ Use soaker hoses and drip irrigation to reduce the amount of water lost to evaporation and run off by up to 70 percent. Water is delivered right where it is needed.

■ Your lawn and garden soil cannot store water for long, so never over-water to cover times you will be away.

■ Avoid over-cutting grass; keep it around five to eight centimetres (two to three inches) high. Tall grass holds water better.

■ Freshly transplanted and young garden plants need small amounts of water applied frequently until they are established. Drip watering tubes are ideal.

■ Use layers of grass clippings or wood chips around plants, shrubs and trees to hold and retain water.

■ Be sure to shut off all outdoor taps tightly and inspect them regularly for leaks. Winter takes its toll on outside taps. Repair any leaks promptly.

■ Landscape your yard to minimize rain and sprinkler water run-off. Consider planting ground cover other than grass. There are many different kinds to choose from.

■ Select and plant new shrubs, trees, plants and groundcover that are native to your area. They generally require little more water than nature provides.

■ Sweep dirt and grass clippings off sidewalks and driveways rather than hosing with copious amounts of water.

Creating your garden

■ A variety of plants attracts a variety of wildlife. Plant a mixture of species so that many different types of birds, animals and insects can find food and shelter.

■ Build homes and shelters for bats, toads and butterflies. (One toad can eat as many as 1,500 earwigs in one summer.)





■ Assist birds by using bird feeders (especially during periods of severe winter weather) and bird houses, by deliberately growing bushes and trees that provide them with food and shelter, and by maintaining a bird bath.

■ Create a pond in your backyard to attract frogs and toads. By creating a favourable habitat, you may help to maintain or increase amphibian populations that have been decreasing in recent years.

■ Use native species. Our songbirds take more readily to a familiar thicket of native dogwood or willow than to introduced, exotic species such as weeping mulberry. Native species provide food as well as cover, and are not as likely as introduced species to dominate other native plants.

■ Do your bit to conserve biodiversity by planting heritage plants in your garden. You'll help save them from extinction.

■ Gardeners and farmers help wildlife when they avoid the use of pesticides. Many birds die every year after feeding on fields, lawns, or golf courses immediately after treatment with short-lived pesticides. Look for less harmful ways to control insects and weeds. Or live with them—crabgrass and wasps are wildlife too.

■ Keep your domestic animals under control. A bell around the neck of an outdoor cat alerts birds. Domestic cats kill millions of songbirds a year.





■ Participate in the land-use planning process in your community to ensure that wildlife habitat, especially habitat for endangered species, is protected.

Garden and lawn pesticides

It makes good sense to avoid using pesticides in our yards whenever possible. Since the 1950s, the number of insects and mites known to be resistant to insecticides has grown from fewer than 10 to about 450.

When pesticides are used, they must be applied safely and responsibly, according to the label instructions.

Alternatives

■ Insects such as spider mites, aphids and mealybugs can be removed from your plants, bushes and trees by hosing them off with a strong burst of water.

■ Wearing garden gloves, pick small insects such as lilac leaf miners, leaf rollers, Colorado potato beetles, and spruce budworms off your plants by hand. This is best done early in the morning.

■ Likewise, wearing garden gloves, pick forest tent caterpillar larvae off your plants when they cluster together on cool days or in the late evening. Remove any eggs or cocoons from other species in the same manner.

■ Dig out weeds by hand.

■ Keep cutworms away from your tomatoes, peas, cabbages, and beans by removing both ends from cans and sinking them around the bedding plants, or by placing aluminum foil around the base of the plants.

■ Scatter onions throughout your garden instead of planting them in rows, so that root maggots cannot easily travel from plant to plant.





■ Hoe your garden regularly to control weeds and keep plants healthier.

■ Rotate the species of vegetables and flowers in your garden from year to year, or at least rotate the same species between locations, to discourage soil diseases and insects from setting in.

■ Avoid keeping old bags and baskets, decaying vegetables and other rubbish in your yard because they can provide homes for insects. Old tires often provide breeding places for mosquitoes.

■ Get rid of slugs by placing flat boards near your plants, and then later lifting the boards and destroying the slugs that gather there to avoid sunlight.

■ Schedule the planting and harvesting of your plants to avoid the times when insects are most abundant and damaging.

■ Plant marigolds, chrysanthemums, chives, onions, garlic, basil, savory, horseradish, mint, thyme and the like among and near your garden plants because their natural odours and root secretions repel some insects.

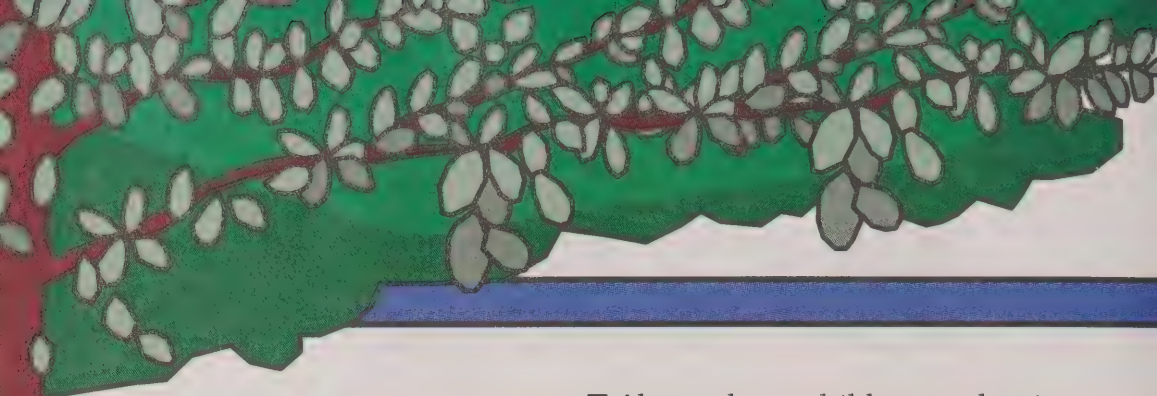
■ Insecticidal soaps can be used to dislodge or suffocate insects.

■ If you feel that pesticides are required, use degradable natural products such as *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt). (The labels usually say "thuricide" or "biological insecticide.")

■ Put bird feeders and bird houses in your yard; birds are a natural form of insect control.

■ Invite toads into your vegetable patch by building a "toad house", such as an old terra cotta pot with an opening in the side, or a small pile of rocks with an opening.





Using pesticides safely

- Always keep pesticides in their original containers and follow label instructions carefully.
- Store pesticides in tightly closed, waterproof containers and in secure (preferably locked), well-ventilated places that are out of the reach of children and pets.
- Apply only the amounts of pesticides specified on their labels, and apply them only to the appropriate plants and areas indicated.
- Always keep children and animals off lawns that have been treated recently with these products. Follow the label's directions.
- Never use pesticides near wells, streams, ponds or marshes unless their labels specify that the products can be safely used in such areas.
- Never apply pesticides to eroded areas, because rain may carry them to streams, rivers, lakes, etc.
- Most pesticides should not be used on days when rain is forecast (read the labels) or when it is windy.

Composting

A compost pile reduces the amount of garbage you put out for collection by about one-third, and provides an excellent source of fertilizer.

Information on composting is available from many municipalities, at most community libraries and from agricultural organizations.



■ Buy a pre-made compost bin, or make your own. If you do not want your own compost pile, perhaps a neighbour with one would appreciate your contributions.

■ A simple, home-made compost bin should be a minimum of 1 metre square and 1 to 1.5 metres high. Any smaller than that and it will not generate enough heat inside to decompose the materials efficiently. Contact your municipality for more information on how to build your own composter or where to purchase one.

■ All kinds of kitchen waste can be added to the compost bin, including vegetable tops and salad extras, coffee grounds, tea leaves, egg shells and fruit peelings. **Avoid meat scraps, bones or milk products or you will attract animals.** Yard waste can include small branches, grass cuttings, straw, and soil.

Septic tank systems

Misused or malfunctioning septic systems can be very harmful to the environment.

■ Watch for the following signs of septic tank system malfunctions: bright green spots in your lawn; puddles of sewage on your lawn; soft, spongy sections of ground; or sewage odour in your basement. If they occur, arrange for repairs promptly.

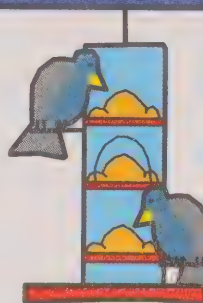
■ **Never pour antibiotics or household chemical products down your toilet or drains—they destroy the bacteria in septic tank systems.**

■ Wash only small loads of laundry in your washing machine to avoid overloading the septic system. Remember to adjust the load size selector accordingly.

■ Know the location of all the components of your septic system and keep heavy vehicles away from the ground above them.

■ Never plant shrubs or trees near your system's drain tiles, because their roots can clog drain lines.

■ Check your system annually and have a reputable contractor remove sludge and scum every three to five years.



Miscellaneous

Here are some additional helpful hints and habits for around the yard.

- Help slow down the greenhouse effect and reduce carbon dioxide air pollution by planting and looking after as many trees as possible in your yard. Trees absorb carbon dioxide.
- Use sand or a salt alternative instead of salt on your sidewalks or driveways during the winter.
- Use pressure-treated lumber for building backyard decks, borders and fences.
- Don't use preserved wood or old railway ties near a vegetable garden. Rain can wash chemicals out of the wood and into the soil.
- Help reduce harmful soil erosion by taking measures to channel rainwater run-off so that it collects and then filters slowly down through the soil, rather than running off rapidly into storm drains or streams.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn or compost them—don't put them in the garbage.
- Re-seed bare patches in your lawn as soon as possible to avoid soil erosion.
- Try a push mower instead of a power mower. You'll save gas or electricity, reduce air and noise pollution, and get more exercise to boot!



While Shopping

Environmental Choice[™] Program

Environment Canada established the Environmental Choice[™] Program in 1988 to help Canadians identify products that are less of a burden on the environment. In 1995, TerraChoice Environmental Services Inc. was licensed to manage and deliver the Program. Once a product or service has been certified, it can carry the EcoLogo[™]—three stylized doves in the shape of a maple leaf.

The Program, in consultation with industry, environmental groups, universities and independent technical and scientific advisors, determines product categories and establishes the criteria that those

products must meet in order to carry the EcoLogo. Look for the Environmental Choice symbol on a growing number of products.



■ Buy non-hazardous or least-hazardous products. Study the labels on products to help you choose.

■ If you must buy environmentally-hazardous products, buy them in quantities you will be able to use up completely, so that you will not need to dispose of the leftovers.

■ When possible, buy beverages in returnable or recyclable containers.



■ Buy products in bulk, rather than in typically over-packaged smaller sizes, and store them in jars and other containers that you have saved. (Packaging makes up about one-third of all solid waste by weight.)

■ Avoid excessively-packaged goods, and tell the retailer and manufacturer why you are doing so. Our purchasing power as consumers can influence manufacturers and merchants to be more environmentally conscious.

■ Try organically grown foods. This supports farmers whose land is the most “wildlife sensitive”.

■ Buy a greater variety of fruits, vegetables and grains to ensure greater food choices and a safer food supply.

■ Look for the EcoLogo on cloth diapers and diaper services.

■ Buy recycled stationery as well as products printed on paper with high post-consumer recycled fibre content. This publication, for example, is printed on recycled paper. Look for the EcoLogo when purchasing stationery.



■ Buy or make fabric shopping bags that can be used again and again. If you have old plastic shopping bags, re-use them instead of bringing home new ones each time you go to the store.

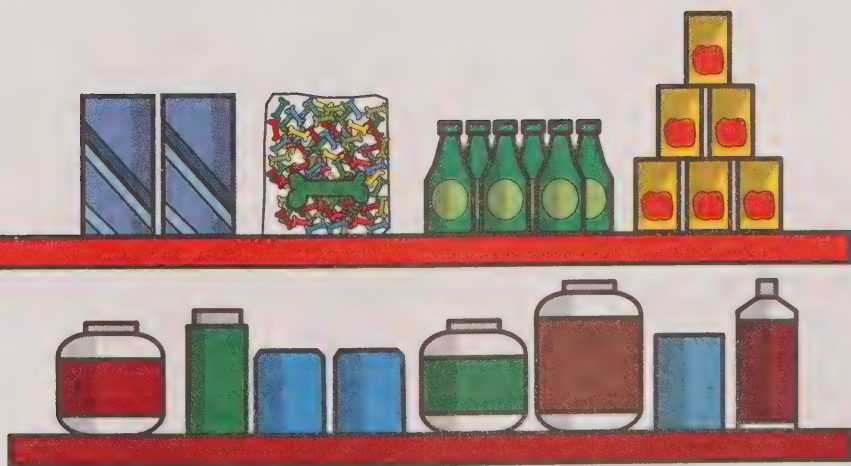
■ Purchase alkaline or rechargeable batteries for flashlights, radios, clocks, watches, calculators and toys. Look for the EcoLogo when you shop for batteries.

■ Ask your local photo print shop if they recycle their chemicals and reclaim the silver from processing operations. If not, encourage them to do so.

■ Use a dry cleaner that offers “Green Cleaning”, a technique that uses water to clean garments that are usually dry cleaned. Water-based cleaning is not only better for the environment, but also more effective for many garments.

■ Speak up and make your views and wishes about environmentally-safe products known to store managers.

■ Write letters to the presidents of companies letting them know how you feel about their products. More and more companies realize that being good environmental citizens is good business.



At School

Education is the first step toward cleaning up our environment. Teachers and students have crucial roles to play in protecting and conserving our environment.

Students

By practicing environmentally responsible habits, today's students can set a good example for all of us to do our share to save this planet.

■ Participate actively in environmental fairs, government environment department tours, and poster, essay, song or play contests about the environment.

■ Organize or participate in neighbourhood or school clean-up campaigns or rehabilitation projects, such as rehabilitating a local stream or wetland.

■ Many students are creating wildlife habitats at school. The Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF) encourages these projects through HABITAT 2000. Find out more by contacting them.

■ As a school project, build some nesting boxes for birds. Once the birds have occupied them, monitor the birds and learn about their habits and lifestyles.

■ Organize special paper, glass, plastic or metal recycling projects. They can also serve as fund raisers.



■ Sign up environmental projects for the annual science fairs held in your area.

■ Use this booklet to assess the environmental behaviour of your parents, friends and neighbours, and to suggest what more they can do to help our environment.

■ Learn about and visit Canada's many national and provincial parks.

■ The Evergreen Foundation is helping to train communities, teachers and schools on school ground naturalization. Could your schoolyard be greener? Find out more by contacting your school board.

Teachers

Today's teachers have the exciting opportunity to nurture an environmental conscience in tomorrow's adults and help them learn environmentally-sound lifestyles.

■ Contact your federal or provincial environment department for information on special teaching aids and on environmental protection and conservation.

■ Use the special teaching kits that the Canadian Wildlife Federation sends to schools every year for Wildlife Week in early April.

■ Organize a tree-planting event for National Forest Week (first full week in May).

■ Plan events and activities to take place during Canadian Environment Week (the first week in June).

■ Observe World Day for Water (March 22) by conducting a water audit of your school.

■ Organize and lead special school yard and neighbourhood litter clean-up campaigns.

■ Arrange for your students to tour bird sanctuaries, national parks and other wildlife areas.

■ Look for learning experiences outdoors in local parks, on a farm or in other green spaces.

■ Organize annual environmental fairs at your school.

■ Organize poster, essay, song or play contests with environmental topics and themes.

The Automobile

The environment doesn't share our enthusiasm for automobiles. Exhaust emissions contribute directly to several environmental problems, including smog and climate change. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is the principal greenhouse gas and its production is directly related to how much fuel we use when we drive our cars. Driving less and driving smarter can lower CO₂, toxic air pollutants and other emissions that are harmful to the environment and our health.

The transportation challenge lies in reducing the impacts of the vehicle, while continuing to enjoy the advantages it offers. It's a difficult dilemma, but there are solutions. These solutions lie in big and small changes in our communities, in how we get to and from work, and in what we're willing to pay as transportation users.

Drive less

As individuals, we can do a lot to decrease the use of our vehicles and save money, too!

- Think about whether some of your commuting or short trips are absolutely necessary. For example, can you buy groceries every two weeks instead of every week? Can you "chain" your errands to the post office, dry cleaners and shoe repair? It could save time, too!
- Try car pooling, whether for work or to take your kids to their soccer practice.
- Use public transit a few times more each week.



■ Walk or bicycle to the corner store and to work more often, if possible.

■ Try a group walk to school (a walking school bus with parents taking turns at supervision) as an alternative to the school bus.

■ Give up the second car—it frees up significant money for investing in your mortgage, or elsewhere, and encourages family members to try transportation alternatives.

■ Next time you move, consider moving to an area that is closer to work, school and other activities and would let you and your household reduce car use.

Drive Smarter

We can also look at the way we use our vehicles so that they are less polluting.

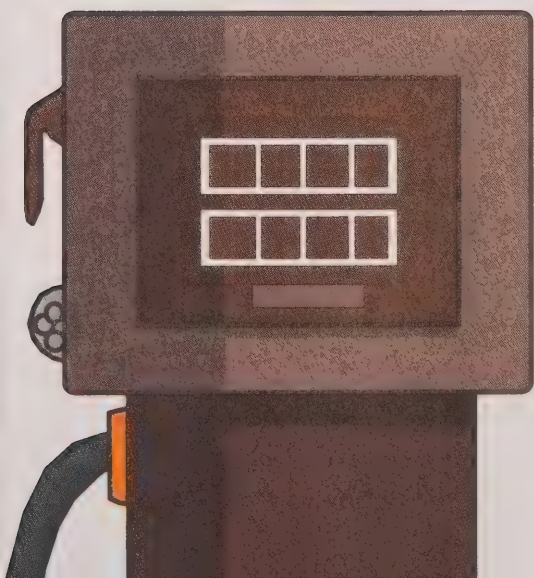
■ When you buy a new vehicle, choose one that is as fuel-efficient as possible, and remember mini-vans and light trucks usually don't get good mileage.

■ Follow the recommended maintenance schedule in the owner's manual.

■ Keep your car well tuned and have your emission control system checked at least once a year.

■ Don't idle: turn off your engine while waiting outside the shopping mall or ice rink.

■ Only use your car's air conditioner when it's really necessary—it increases fuel usage significantly—and have it serviced regularly.



■ Don't overfill your gas tank—the first time the pump stops, don't restart it (spillage is a major source of ozone pollution). And look for EcoLogo-certified ethanol-blended gasolines and re-refined oil.

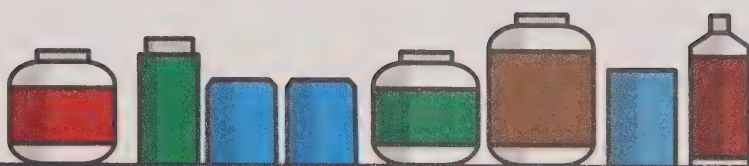
■ Drive the speed limit and avoid sudden starts and stops. Driving at moderate speeds uses less fuel and saves you money.

■ Block heaters reduce air pollution by reducing the amount of fuel required to warm up the engine. Use a timer to turn on your block heater for one to two hours before morning start-ups when temperatures fall well below freezing.

Community Solutions

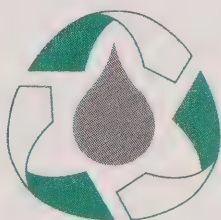
■ Communities, non-government groups, the private sector, governments and individuals have a role to play in more efficient transportation. Ways to achieve a more sustainable transportation system include traffic calming; adapting neighbourhoods to be more pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly; and improving the integration of different modes of transportation. For more information on the environmental and health impacts of the automobile and ways to help your community reduce its dependence on the automobile, call (819) 997-2800 or 1-800-668-6767 to ask for a free copy of "Canada's Transportation Challenge".





Be careful with hazardous wastes

■ If you change the oil in your vehicle yourself, be sure to collect it in a sturdy container and then take it to a gas station or garage that accepts used oil for recycling. Those that do can be identified by the Canadian Petroleum Products Institute (CPPI) recycling logo (pictured below). CPPI's used oil recycling program is currently operating in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia and P.E.I. Some curbside recycling programs also accept used oil products—check with your municipality. (One litre of oil can contaminate up to two million litres of drinking water.)



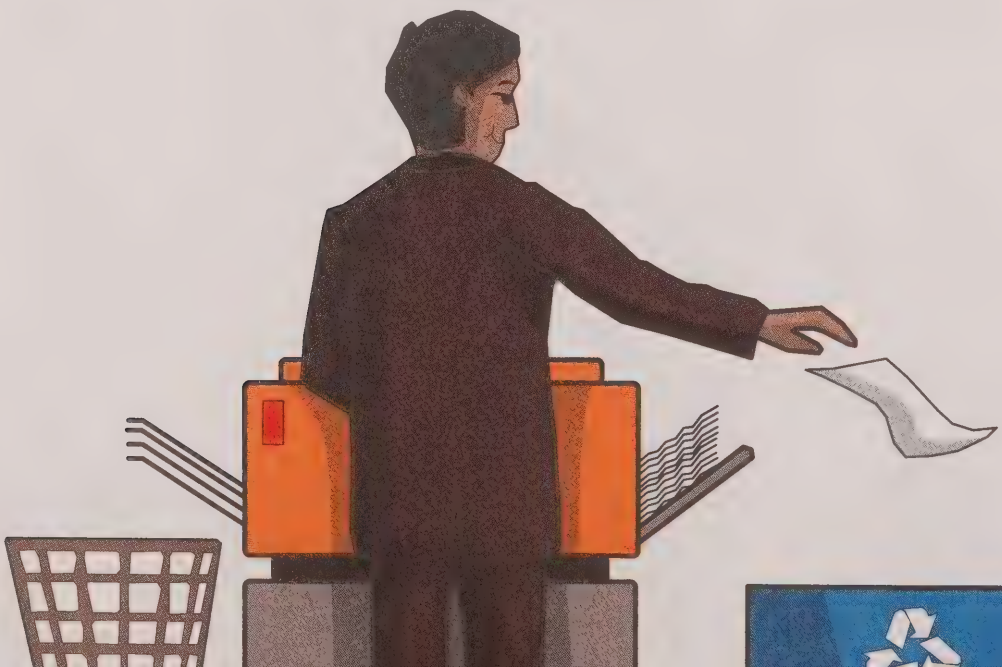
- Unwanted or leftover antifreeze should be taken to a gas station or garage that accepts it. (Antifreeze is poisonous to animals and people—make sure it is stored safely.)
- If you change your car battery, take the old one to a recycling depot.



At Work

Work for your environment as well as for your employer. Take your environmental etiquette with you to work.

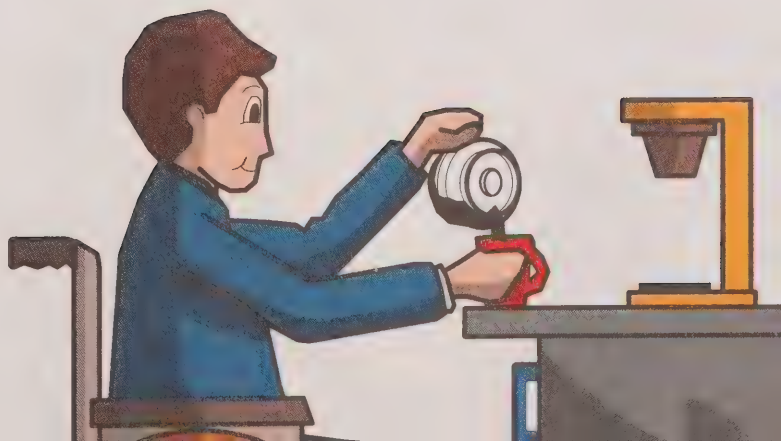
- Use the stairs instead of the elevator for short trips. You'll save electricity and get some exercise, to boot!
- Help save energy by turning off lights and computer equipment at night. Turning off idle equipment can save up to \$100 per work station over a year.
- Encourage your building manager to have energy and water audits performed and to develop water and energy management plans. Replacing old equipment with water-efficient and energy-efficient fixtures can significantly reduce operating costs.
- Always turn taps off tightly so they do not drip, and watch for and report drips or leaks to the building manager. Be sure someone repairs them promptly.
- Do not use toilets as garbage cans to dispose of cigarette butts, paper tissues and other items.
- Watch for leaks from toilet tanks into toilet bowls, at the base of toilets, or around urinals, and report them promptly to the building manager.
- Look for the EcoLogo on paper and other office supplies. All purchases should be made with environmental considerations in mind.
- Produce double-sided documents and photocopies.



- Reduce paper usage by using electronic mail for internal communications.
- Try to have items that no longer work repaired, rather than discarding and replacing them.
- Encourage your employer to purchase and, if appropriate, manufacture products that are less harmful to the environment.
- Bring your lunch to work in reusable containers and take home recyclables and compostables if collection facilities don't exist at the office.

Waste management

- If your workplace does not have an organized recycling program, encourage your employer and fellow employees to start one. Or organize an informal one yourself by (a) establishing conveniently located collection sites, (b) providing collection boxes or containers, (c) informing and reminding co-workers of the sites, and (d) arranging for pick-ups by a recycling firm.
- Collect paper that has previously been used on one side and re-use it for such things as fax messages, draft documents and notepads.
- Pass items you no longer need on to co-workers who can make use of them, rather than automatically throwing them out.



■ Save and re-use such items as binders, file folders, envelopes, cerlox bindings, paper clips, elastics, etc.

■ Follow and encourage environmentally safe practices in the storage, use and disposal of hazardous wastes at the work site.

■ If your workplace does not have car pools, volunteer to organize one.

■ Use your own re-usable coffee cup, rather than a disposable cup.

■ If there are gasoline, heating oil or chemical storage tanks at your worksite, ensure that a tank inspection program is in place that routinely monitors them for any leaks.

■ Take copies of this booklet to work and share them with co-workers. Put a copy in the lunchroom and on information racks.

Therma Tech Technology Inc.

This exchange was established in 1978 to put companies in touch with each other so they can find users for their waste by-products and leftovers.

■ Find out if your company is a member of this exchange. If it is not but should be, contact the exchange to find out how to become a member.

Therma Tech Technology Inc.
195 County Court Blvd.
Brampton, Ontario
L6W 4P7
(905) 450-8866

Outdoors

Practise your environmental etiquette when you're outdoors. Treat your campsite, trailer park, or cottage as your home. Visit a national park during your vacation to learn more about Canadian wildlife and ecosystems. Never litter or contaminate the beach or water.

Boating

■ Consider boating activities, such as canoeing, sailing, kayaking or windsurfing, that require little or no fuel and don't disturb wildlife or habitat.

■ Never throw garbage of any kind overboard. Take it back to shore with you and dispose of it properly.

■ Watch your wake, especially if you're within 150 metres of the shore. Waves cause shoreline erosion and can also disrupt wildlife habitat. Know the speed at which your vessel produces the smallest wake.

■ Avoid the temptation to top up your gas tank when refuelling. Doing so often results in small toxic spills.

■ Use extreme caution not to pollute the environment when using cleansers, paints, and anti-fouling compounds on your boat. Use products that are less harmful to the environment. For example, non-toxic wax is an effective alternative to anti-fouling paint.



■ Keep discharges of so-called “grey water” from on-board sinks, shower drains and bilges to a minimum. Use biodegradable products and never dump hazardous products or oily water down the drains.

■ Have your on-board sewage holding tanks and toilet plumbing system inspected and approved by provincial environment officials. Make certain that you meet all local regulations for storage and discharge.

■ Pump out your holding tanks only at approved pump-out stations and marinas.

■ Always dispose of used oil in special oil recycling tanks available at most marinas and government docks.

Camping ethics

Become a low-impact user of our many parks and wilderness areas. No one, especially the wildlife, should see any evidence that you have been there at all!

■ Use existing campsites, trails and portages. Don't cut new trails, dig trenches, or try to improve a site by removing vegetation.

■ Carry out everything that you brought with you into the wilderness.



■ Plan on using a camp stove on your next camping trip. The new ones are light, reliable and safe. Besides, they save wood and reduce fire hazards.

■ Using biodegradable soap, wash your dirty dishes, clothes and even yourself in a dish pan and not in a lake, stream or river. Then discard the dirty water some distance away from the source.

■ Avoid disturbing wildlife, particularly young animals or nesting birds. Remember, you're the guest in their home.

■ Be sure to guard your food and garbage from wildlife. Never feed wild animals, as this interferes with their natural habits.

■ If you find injured or dead birds with bands on their legs, contact Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service, your provincial wildlife department or call 1-800-327-2263 from anywhere in Canada.

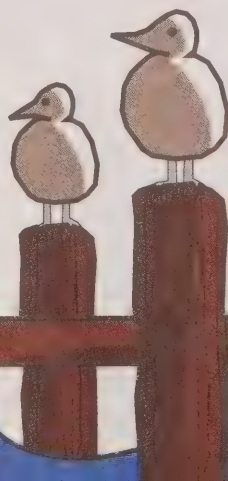
■ Visit some of Canada's 38 national parks and hundreds of provincial parks to learn more about your outdoor environment.

At the cottage

No one has a better chance to observe the effects of human population and pollution on wilderness than do cottagers, who return each year to the same location. With over half a million cottages in Canada, they can create quite an impact.

The environmentally responsible behaviour you practise at home is particularly important for cottages, because they are usually located on the banks of rivers, or on the shores of lakes or oceans. Guidelines for the environmentally safe operation of septic tank systems are crucial; be sure to locate such systems as far from the water as possible. (See page 19 of this booklet for more information.)

■ Be sure to bring back all recyclables from your cottage and dispose of them, if you have a community recycling program.



■ Start a compost pile.

■ Consider a biological toilet instead of a septic tank system. They are simple and produce no harmful residue or sludge.

■ If your cottage is located on or near a bank or shore, preserve as much as possible of the natural vegetation between the cottage and the water to reduce rainfall run-off that may carry harmful sewage organisms. Plant new shrubs and trees, if need be, using native species.

■ Preserve local wildlife by being careful not to disturb waterfowl or their nesting areas. Avoid filling in wetlands, altering shorelines, or allowing dogs to run at large.

■ Avoid motorized sports such as snowmobiling, trail-bike riding and speedboating in favour of less polluting activities such as cross-country skiing, hiking, sailing, canoeing, cycling or walking.

■ Never ride all-terrain vehicles or trail bikes along beaches, through marshes or in other areas where birds nest and breed.

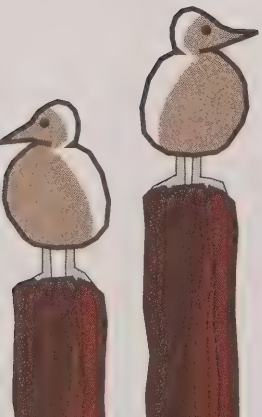
Other outdoor tips

■ Make nature-oriented outdoor activities, such as bird watching, nature photography, animal study, or stargazing, a hobby for the entire family.

■ Never litter, and help out by picking up any litter left by others.

■ Participate in organized litter clean-up campaigns, or organize one yourself.

■ Volunteer to assist with environmental emergency clean-ups, if help is requested.



You and Your Neighbours

Concerned individuals who take responsibility for the environment make good neighbours; and good neighbours make for healthy neighbourhoods.

■ If there is no environmental group in your community, and there are pressing environmental issues to be addressed, start one yourself.

Things you can do

■ Support organizations that work to protect and improve the environment.

■ If you are not already a member of a local environmental or conservation group, join up and participate actively; or at least consider making a financial donation to such groups.



■ Write letters to the editors of your local newspapers to make your views on environmental issues known. Large companies often circulate news clippings and articles to senior management in order to gauge public opinion.

■ Write letters to the presidents of companies to express your views about their polluting practices, praise them for their environmental responsibility, or encourage the manufacture and sale of environmentally-responsible products. Libraries are a good source for names and addresses.

■ Write letters about environmental issues to the federal Minister of the Environment, your provincial Minister of the Environment, your local MP and MLA, your mayor, school boards and others.

■ When the federal, provincial or municipal government holds public consultation meetings or public hearings in your area on environmental issues, attend the meetings and present your views.

■ When voting in municipal, provincial and federal elections, consider the environmental positions and practices of the candidates.

Group projects and activities

Business groups, civic organizations, faith groups, union organizations, women's groups, neighbourhood or community associations, special interest organizations and youth groups all have roles to play in helping our environment.

■ Through Action 21, Environment Canada makes funds available to nongovernment, nonprofit groups to take local action on priority issues such as: air quality, toxic substances, biodiversity and conserving ecosystems. Contact your regional Environment Canada office listed in the back of this booklet for more information.





■ Join neighbourhood litter and pollution clean-up days.

■ Plant trees. They help to reduce greenhouse gases by absorbing carbon dioxide.

■ Organize a neighbourhood recycling program or establish a recycling depot if one does not already exist. (Contact your provincial environment department for information and guidance.)

■ Hold fund-raising events and donate the money to a local environmental group; or use the funds to carry out your own environmental projects, such as purchasing trees for your group to plant.

■ Plan environmental education events for your group. Invite a federal or provincial environment department expert or a spokesperson from an environmental group to make a presentation or give a talk.

■ Show environmental education films, which are available at a small charge from the National Film Board.

■ Arrange for tours of bird sanctuaries, national parks and other wildlife areas.

■ Celebrate Environment Week (the first week of June).



■ Use your group's influence to encourage companies to be environmentally responsible and to manufacture and sell products that are less harmful to the environment. Always address letters to the president of the company.

■ Help your group prepare position papers on local environmental issues and submit them to appropriate federal and provincial environment ministers, city hall, and other politicians to influence environmental programs, policies and laws.

■ Adopt a beach, creek or other significant environment area and initiate a program to monitor, clean and restore the area.

Where To Get Help

Action 21 Regional Offices

Atlantic

1-800-663-5755

Quebec

1-800-463-4311

Ontario

1-800-661-7785

Prairie & Northern

1-800-665-7135

(Manitoba & Saskatchewan)

1-800-567-1570

(Alberta & NWT)

Pacific & Yukon

1-800-667-7779

Visit The Green Lane,
Environment Canada's
Internet site, at
<http://www.ec.gc.ca>

Environmental Choice Program

TerraChoice Environmental
Services Inc.

2197 Riverside Drive
Ottawa, ON K1H 7X3
(613) 247-1900

Look in the blue pages of your
local telephone book for:
Provincial and Territorial
Environment Departments
Municipal/County Offices

Other sources are:
Libraries
Local Environmental Groups
Companies and Associations

